

**REX**

**-v-**

(1) **SEAN REAY**  
(2) **KELVIN CRAIG LAWSON**  
(3) **THOMAS LEE STERLING**  
(4) **KEVIN DORWARD**  
(5) **KEITH DORWARD**  
(6) **MICHAELA HETHERINGTON**

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**SENTENCING REMARKS**

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1. You may all remain seated until I tell you to stand.
2. Sean Reay, Kelvin Lawson and Thomas Sterling you have been found guilty of the murder of Barry Dawson.
3. Kevin Doward, Keith Doward and Michaela Hetherington you have pleaded guilty to perverting the course of Justice.

**Facts**

4. Just after 5.15 pm on (Saturday) 5 April 2025, Barry Dawson, who was aged 60, was shot dead whilst he was standing in the ground floor living room of his home address at 22 Elm Street in South Moor. He died instantly. You, Sean Reay, shot him in the chest with a handgun from the street, through his broken front window.
5. Barry Dawson was a wholly innocent man who was not the intended target of the shooting. For him it had been a normal Saturday; breakfast in the café with his friend and then home with his partner Ms Smallwood relaxing in his own home.

6. He was a much loved father and grandfather and was a very popular and respected local figure. He had lived in the same street for over 20 years, and the community still does things in his memory.
7. He was torn away from the lives of his family and nothing can be said or done to ease what is for them a life sentence of grief. They live with the effects of his murder each and every day.
8. The Prosecution do not need to prove a motive for you taking a gun to No 22 Elm Street but it is plainly the case that the shooting was linked to an event earlier in the day at about 8.30 am when a green jeep pulled up outside Sean Reay's house in Annfield Plain and there was an altercation with the person or people in the Jeep.
9. I have no doubt that you Reay, Lawson and Sterling being close associates discussed what to do in reprisal during the day. A day spent drinking, and also for two of you, taking cocaine
10. A gun was already possessed or was sourced. DNA proves that you Lawson handled the ammunition.
11. You then needed a lift to and from South Moor. You Reay then used the existence of a £380 drug debt and an offer of £100 worth of free drugs to get the services of Kevin Dorward and his Seat Arona car. As it was you got his cousin for free as the driver. That made five of you.
12. That Green Jeep later parked up behind No 22, but you Reay, Lawson and Sterling already knew that the person or people that you wished to deal with were likely to be at that property at some stage.
13. The five of you drove from your house Reay to Elm Street. On the way over you stopped to get alcohol and then Keith Doward, the driver, was sent out to buy some gloves and a hat. He succeeded in getting the former.
14. You then arrived at the rear of 22 Elm Street and parked near the Green Jeep. Keith Dorwood remained in the car and the other four of you got out.
15. You Kelvin Lawson then went onto Elm Street no doubt to check the area out. You were aware that children were in the street and returned back to the area behind Elm Street. You then went back onto Elm Street with Thomas Sterling. I have no doubt he came to give you back up.
16. Children were still around in the vicinity, indeed you Sterling nearly bumped into two small children. You Kelvin Lawson then smashed the window of No 22 with a brick.
17. I am sure, given all the evidence (including what later transpired) that the purpose of smashing the window was to lure the occupants out and around the corner to where the four of you would be waiting.

18. The plan was partially successful as Shane Dawson, Barry Dawson's son did emerge from the No 22 carrying a wooden pickaxe handle (he had been seen earlier on in the day taking it into the house; no doubt to be used as a weapon if needed) and together with a neighbour they ran to the area behind No 22. However when they saw the four of you, they quickly retreated. Shane Dawson ran back into No 22 taking back with another man, Keiran Stewart, who had also by then emerged also with a long piece of wood.
19. The group of four of you then emerged onto Elm Street. You were using masks to conceal your faces.
20. In the meantime Barry Dawson who had been upstairs with his partner Sarah Hopwood came downstairs; he had no top on and wanted to know what was going on.
21. When on Elm Street the first thing that you did Reay was to head towards the house of the neighbour who had and run with Shane Dawson to the rear of No 22. He was back standing on his doorstep. You went over and raised the gun at him. You Sterling admitted that you had seen the gun at this point. The CCTV shows you as unbothered when gun produced on street, indeed you took a step forward. You were then the recipient of an instruction from Reay to get the car turned around no doubt to ensure a speedy get away.
22. Then you Reay and you Lawson when to No 22. Lawson you kicked the door twice, then you further broke the window. I am sure that the purpose was to allow Reay a better view into the property to shoot.
23. Reay you then lifted your hood so you could see better. The blinds were flapping and there were gaps, and I am sure that you Reay could see the people inside and you shot at one of them. I have no doubt your intended target was not Barry Dawson, but Shane Dawson or Kieran Stewart or the other man who was present in the house (having arrived earlier with Shane Dawson). You shot the wrong man.
24. The arrangement to go to Elm Street as a group taking the loaded gun, buying the gloves, smashing the window to try and lure the occupants out, the four of you coming onto Elm Street, intimidating the neighbour with the gun, getting the car in a position to leave quickly, and ensuring conditions for a better shot showed that you were working as a team, a squad of trusted friends. You Sean Reay were in charge with you Kelvin Lawson and you Thomas Sterling as key lieutenants who would stick together, acting with the same intention and the same objective: to kill someone who was inside No 22 as a reprisal for what happened earlier in the day. I am satisfied so I am sure that was the intention of the trip over was and was shared by three of you.
25. After the shooting you then left Elm Street as Barry Dawson shouted out "they've shot my Dad". You Kevin Doward were sufficiently worried about the speed Keith was diving away from the scene and the fact that he would not speed up if followed that you took over the driving. Later after you all returned to Thomas Sterling's house there was mention of washing hands in petrol to get rid of the gun shot residue. At some stage Sean Reay told you Kevin Dorward to get rid of the car.

26. You Kevin Dorward and you Keith Doward then agreed between you to try and stage a theft of the car and burn it out. You Kevin drove to a social club with Micheala Hetherington and left the keys behind the bar and started drinking as if it were a normal evening out. At no stage did you show any signs of panic. You Keith then used a spare set to collect the car from the social club car park and drive it off to a local park where you tried to burn it out. You used accelerant inside the car but did not leave a window open so the fire was starved of oxygen and did not take hold. Given that your story would mean that the car was stolen hours after the shooting and that the car was driven by you both, the only sensible conclusion is that you were trying to destroy evidence linking Reay, Lawson and Sterling and/or the gun, through gunshot residue, to the car. I have no doubt that you did this knowing that Reay had killed someone in Elm Street.
27. Kevin Dorward you then told Michaela Hetherington to phone the police and report the car stolen although she knew that it had not been. She checked the insurance position online and reported it stolen the next day 6<sup>th</sup> at 10:39am, telling the police she had last seen the vehicle on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2025 at 6-6:30pm.
28. Michaela Hetherington you then attended at the site of the partly burnt out car and lied to the Police. You maintained the lie when interviewed under caution.
29. The division of the group after the shooting was in line with the Dorwards just being there to provide transport and assistance rather than being part of the planning of the shooting; that was restricted to you Reay, Lawson and Sterling. Kevin Doward you stayed at the social club and then went to the pub. Keith Doward you stayed at home apart from trying to dispose of the car. The other three of you took flight to Scotland that night. That trip was not properly thought through and you returned before you Reay left for Scotland again.
30. You Reay, Lawson and Sterling clearly cannot have anticipated that the events on Elm Street would be caught on house security camera. You also left other evidence; Kelvin Lawson's DNA was on the bullet casing found at the scene Thomas Sterling's DNA on a rock found at the rear of No 22.
31. If you were a victim of any crime that morning Reay, and you gave evidence of threats to burn your house down, you did not contact the police (indeed you made it plain that you would never do that) rather you took the law into your own hands. You Lawson and Sterling helped Reay with whatever he thought he should do in response. After the shooting, even though you knew an innocent man had been shot you stayed silent and gave no help to the police. Each of you share a code which sees the police as the enemy in all circumstances. However the Police are vitally important agents of all ordinary decent people. There are laws to keep people safe and society functioning and they need to be enforced.
32. You can reflect on where you code has got you during your decades in prison. Until you reject the code you will not be safe to rejoin society.
33. Unusually it is also proper for me to say something about others who witnessed Barry Dawson being shot. Regrettably the Police did not get fully truthful accounts and also faced a refusal to give evidence. There is a duty on all of those who witness serious

crime, and this was the most serious crime, to assist the Police and in so doing to protect ordinary and decent people.

### **Schedule 21**

34. For the grave offence of murder there is only one sentence prescribed by law that is imprisonment for life. That is the sentence I shall impose upon you Reay, Lawson and Sterling in due course. However, I am required to determine the minimum period you should serve in prison before you are eligible to be considered for release on parole.
35. It is most important that you, and everyone concerned with this case, should understand what the minimum term means. The minimum term is not a fixed term after which you will be automatically released but the minimum time that you will spend in custody before your case can be considered by the parole board. It will be for the parole board to say at that time whether or not you will be released. If and when you are released, you will still be subject to licence and this will be the case the rest of your life. If for any reason your licence were to be revoked you would be recalled to prison to serve your life sentence in custody.
36. In coming to the appropriate minimum term, I must first decide where this case falls within schedule 21 of the Sentencing Act 2020
37. Here the starting point is 30 years.
38. It is the same starting point for a secondary party such as you Lawson and you Sterling as it is for the principal you, Sean Reay, who pulled the trigger.
39. However the starting point is just that and a distinction between the minimum terms may be appropriate to reflect the lesser culpability of a secondary party. Also I must weigh up the relevant aggravating and mitigating factors for each of you.

### **Sean Reay**

40. Sean Reay you are aged 30.
41. You chose not to disclose what the argument was about that led to the murder of Barry Dawson. Given that you were engaged in the supply of drugs it is highly likely it was related to drugs in some way. However I am not sure of this and it does not factor into your sentence.

### **Aggravating features common to the three Defendants**

42. I start with some aggravating features common to the three of you who were found guilty of murder.

43. You acted as a group, and it needed a group to carry out your plan and to deal with any eventuality, given that there could be two or three men (as there in facts was) in No 22 (apart from Barry Dawson).
44. There was a significant degree of planning and/or premeditation. As I have already explained a loaded gun was taken to No 22 with the intention of shooting a person, a lift was arranged with Kevin Doward paid for by drugs, gloves were bought on route, masks were used and there was a plan to lure the occupants of No 22 out and around the corner. It matters not that given the likelihood of detection it was not a very good plan. The decision to shoot someone was not a spur of the moment decision or opportunistic.
45. Importantly, this was 5.30 on a Saturday afternoon on an ordinary street. Members of the public were nearby and children had been on the street moments earlier. You turned this street turned into a very dangerous place. A gun was used to threaten a man on his own doorstep and Barry Dawson was shot in his own living room, what should have been a place of safety
46. You were each influence of alcohol, to varying degrees, and you Lawson and you Sterling had taken cocaine.
47. You have refused to disclose the whereabouts of the gun

#### **Aggravating features for Reay**

48. As for aggravating features applicable to you Sean Reay
49. You were the principal offender. You fired the shot with the intention of killing the person you could see through the blinds. This was a shot at chest height and relatively close quarters without any hesitation.
50. You were also the leader of the gang and directed the day's events.
51. You have previous convictions. Between 2007 and 2020 you were convicted of 18 offences. You were convicted of assault in 2014 and given a suspended sentence although you would have been 19 years of age at the time.
52. You instructed Kevin Doward to get rid of the car to destroy evidence.

#### **Mitigating features**

53. There is no real mitigation. I have sensed no real, or heartfelt, remorse on your part.

### Possession of prohibited firearm

54. As for the offence of possession of a prohibited firearm there is a mandatory minimum custodial sentence of 5 years and a maximum sentence of 10 years. This is a category 1 case with high culpability as the firearm was used for a criminal purpose, so the starting point is 8 years. The aggravating features are clear in that the gun was used to murder in the circumstances which I have outlined.
55. You pleaded guilty to the offence when added to the indictment so I shall give the usual one third discount.
56. However the use of the gun determines the starting point under schedule 21 so the sentence will be concurrent.

### Kelvin Lawson

57. You are now aged 38
58. You were Sean Reay's trusted friend and you handled the ammunition that killed Barry Dawson.
59. You broke the window acting with Sterling to lure the occupants out. Then after Reay had produced the gun to threaten the neighbour you went back to No 22, banged on the door to attract the occupants into the living room of this small house and then you broke the window further to give Reay a clearer view in and then stood to one side. Your actions when on Elm Street were calm and calculated. The shared intention was to shoot inside at someone.

### Aggravating features

60. You have 58 previous convictions over the twenty years up to 2024. These have included offences of affray and possession of a knife for which you received custodial sentences in 2019. Your record is of far less serious, but still serious, offences.

### Mitigating features

61. As for mitigation advanced on your behalf I am sure that the intention was to kill someone. In any event as schedule 21 states an intention to cause grievous bodily harm, as opposed to an intention to kill, "may" provide relevant mitigation. It is not necessarily, or always the case that it does and it is always a facts specific exercise. Here the steps you took to allow a clearer shot into the house would mean that even if I had not been sure of your intent any mitigation would have been of very limited force.
62. I do take into account as providing significant mitigation, the fact that you have a serious medical condition following a car crash in 2020 in which you sustained multiple and I have no doubt life threatening injuries with life long effects. I accept that you need

to wear a large stomach brace and take medication for life and that this will make prison life very difficult indeed at times and your sentence more arduous than it would be for others.

63. Again I have sensed no real or heartfelt remorse on your part.

### **Thomas Sterling**

64. Having been involved in the initial breaking of the window to lure out the occupants, providing support in case of a challenge, you walked back from the alley into Elm Street, masked, as part of a show of strength. After the gun was produced to threaten the neighbour, you took a step forward and then you walked back to the car following the instruction to get the car turned around.

65. I sentence on the basis that Reay directed things on 5<sup>th</sup> April, as was clear from his order to you to get the car ready. Lawson also took the lead with smashing the window and helping out Reay with the shot. Your role was, as Mr Hill KC submitted, a lesser one; but as the jury were sure it was not only an active and supporting one, it was intended to be as such and you knew that Reay had a gun and intended to kill someone.

66. I have already identified the aggravating factors common to the three of you.

67. I take into account your age. Young people continue to mature, albeit at different rates, for some time beyond their 18th birthdays and the youth and maturity of an offender will be factors that inform any sentencing decision,

68. You were aged 21 at the time of this offence and nearly eight years younger than Reay and sixteen years younger than Lawson. You were not a very young man but you were a young man, and under a degree of direction of those much older than you.

69. I have detected no signs in the evidence or the trial of a lack of maturity beyond that to be expected of man your age. Indeed to the limited extent that it gives insight you were self assured when giving evidence, however I have to be careful to separate out misplaced bravado on your part given the dynamics I saw in the dock.

70. You have no previous convictions.

71. I now turn to you Kevin Doward, you Keith Dowrad and you Micheala Hetherington.

### **Perverting the Course of Justice**

72. The offence of an act of perverting the course of justice is a very serious one which strikes at the heart of the administration of justice and will almost always require an immediate custodial sentence.



73. The more serious the underlying offence, ordinarily the higher the starting point for the perverting offence. Here what you were seeking to do was to destroy evidence that might lead to those who had shot and killed someone, so culpability was high.
74. You also planned what you did. It might have been unsophisticated on one level but it may have been very effective. Had the Police been trying to determine forensically whether Reay, Lawson or Sterling, or a gun, had been in the car then burning it out would destroy evidence including any gunshot residue which had been a concern in the group. There is a danger in the ex post facto analysis set out in the mitigation advanced on your behalf, as you did not know when you decided to destroy evidence what other evidence the Police might be able to obtain about who or what was in the car.
75. The Guideline differentiates between conduct which had some impact on the administration of justice as opposed to conduct with limited impact. This is not an easy boundary to assess or one with a bright line. I also take into account the General guideline which sets out overarching principles and states that where harm was intended but no harm or a lower level of harm resulted the sentence will normally be associated with reference to the level of harm intended. Here the harm intended was to destroy evidence linking people directly involved in the shooting to the car.
76. Under the guideline this was high culpability and medium harm and the starting point is two years.
77. Kevin and Keith Doward, you pleaded guilty to the charge when it was added to the indictment and you will therefore receive full credit of one third.
78. Michaela Hetherington, you changed your plea to guilty on the fifth day of the trial.
79. Having determined the starting point, it is then necessary to consider aggravating and mitigating circumstances.

### **Kevin Dorward**

80. You are now aged 38.
81. You are a self acknowledged alcoholic and daily drug user.
82. You had a debt to Sean Reay and you were quite happy to commit a crime if paid. For £100 worth of drugs, you provided a lift to South Moor to put someone's windows in which was what you were initially told the purpose of the journey was. The job meant not only driving over there but also being available if help was needed. The jury were not satisfied that you knew the true purpose of the trip and when Sean Reay produced the gun you did nothing thereafter to assist or encourage him rather you returned to the car in which Keith Doward was waiting. This is relevant as you well knew what had transpired and you then did what Sean Reay told you to do. You destroyed the car after you were aware that someone had been shot and killed.
83. As regards the dynamic between yourself and Keith Doward you were the senior partner and he did what you asked of him. You also involved Michaela Hetherington who would

do what you asked of her. Neither of these two would have become involved in this offence but for you.

#### Aggravating features

- 84. As for the aggravating features of your offence, firstly you involved others.
- 85. Secondly you were under influence of both drink and drugs. This was an aggravating feature and not a mitigating one.
- 86. You gave evidence during the trial about your nine previous convictions for 14 offences. You did so as you have no convictions for violent offences. Your recent convictions are for taking a vehicle (in fact one belonging to Michaela Hetherington) and driving with no licence and with excess alcohol. You drove the car on the 5<sup>th</sup> April whilst disqualified and under the influence of drink and drugs; but you have faced no charges for this conduct and I do not take these matters into account. Your previous convictions are a very limited aggravating factor.

#### Keith Dorward

- 87. You are now aged 48.
- 88. Your life had been stable in the past but had entered a downward spiral after 2015 when you suffered with back pain and stopped work and then at Christmas 2024 you found yourself homeless and living with your cousin Kevin Dorward. You did what he told you to do as he was providing the roof over your head.
- 89. It was you who took the car and tried to burn it out.
- 90. You were the most remorseful of the Defendants about what happened on 5<sup>th</sup> April.
- 91. You need to reflect on the depths to which you have sunk to and get your life back on track.

#### Micheala Hetherington

- 92. You did what was asked of you by Kevin Doward and were loyal to him in line with what you said in texts about your love of him.
- 93. Yours was a limited and subordinate role and you acted under instruction
- 94. I have considered the psychiatric report prepared by Dr Thakkar and the references.
- 95. The conclusions of the psychiatric assessment are that you have had an emotionally unstable personality disorder and psychosis for approximately ten years. You have needed two previous inpatient admissions to Hospital. The opinion is that you were

vulnerable to exploitation and your primary motivation for the offence was relationship preservation and that people with your conditions experience intense relationship instability and that your vulnerability provides some psychiatric mitigation.

96. I have taken into account the guideline for sentencing offenders with mental disorders and in my view your culpability was reduced to a degree as your ability to exercise appropriate judgment was impaired.
97. You have no previous convictions.
98. You have three daughters under 17, at present they are in the care of family members. I accept that it is your understanding (whether or not it is correct or not is another matter) that it is the view of social services is that the children can return to your full-time care, if your relationship with their father ends, and any contact with him is supervised.
99. I also accept that you have ended your relationship with Kevin Dorward and will adhere to any conditions set by Social Services.
100. You did eventually plead guilty and at a stage when no evidence relevant to your offence had been called; I do give some very limited credit for that
101. In your case as with that of Keith Dowrad as the sentence that I will pass in due course is of two years or less I must consider whether it should be suspended. I have evaluated the factors in the guideline in respect of each of you but in my judgment the determinative feature pointing away from suspension is that appropriate punishment can only be achieved by immediate custody.

### **Credit for time on remand**

102. For each of you credit must be given for time on remand.
103. Sean Reay you will have spent 240 days in custody for these offences.
104. Kelvin Lawson you will have spent 243 days in custody for this offence.
105. Thomas Sterling you will have spent 244 days in custody for this offence.
106. Kevin Doward you will have spent 246 days in custody for this offence.
107. Keith Dorward you will have spent 241 days in custody for this offence.
108. Micheala Hetherington you will have spent 246 days in custody for this offence.

### **Associated matters**

109. I direct that if the surcharge applies in this case in respect of any of you it should be drawn up in the appropriate amount.
110. In respect of you Reay, Lawson and Sterling a transcript of these sentencing remarks be attached to your file for the benefit of the Parole Board.
111. Compensation is not appropriate.
112. I wish to praise the work of the police and the prosecution team. The public has been well served by your professionalism.

### **Conclusion and sentences**

113. Sean Reay, Kelvin Lawson and Thomas Sterling please stand up; I shall deal with you first.
114. You committed an extraordinary crime on an ordinary residential street at 5.15 on a Spring Saturday. Barry Dawson was shot dead through the window of his own living room. Children had been playing on the street moments before you produced a gun to threaten one man and then to deliberately shoot another. People had been going about their normal lives and you turned that street into something that most people would see only on TV or in films and then not in this country.
115. Barry Dawson was not the intended target. He was an innocent victim caught up in a reprisal attack. The cause of the dispute has never been revealed; it was very probably drugs related and involved his son and Kieran Stewart.
116. Those tasked with protecting the public are engaged in a constant battle to keep guns and knives off the streets of this country. Thankfully the use of illegal firearms, which is usually gang and/or drug related, is relatively rare, but we must do what can properly be done to stop it altogether. If you use a gun you should not expect, nor will you get, any sympathy from the Court.
117. Sean Reay you were the leader of this attack and fired the shot. You are a dangerous man. Your culpability is the highest. You Kelvin Lawson were involved in enabling a clearer shot and had handled the ammunition; your culpability, although lesser than that of Reay, must reflect the fact that you acted as a team on Elm Street in the final moments to do the shooting.
118. You Thomas Sterling have lesser culpability, but you knew of the gun before it was used and it purpose and were a willing part of the gang and provided active support by your presence and acceptance of the instruction about the car.
119. **Sean Reay** for the offence of murder I sentence you to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 32 years less time spent on remand which is a minimum term of 31 years and 125 days.

120. For the offence of possession of a prohibited firearm there is a concurrent sentence of 76 months.
121. **Kelvin Lawson** for the offence of murder I sentence you to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 28 years less time on remand which is a minimum term of 27 years and 122 days.
122. **Thomas Sterling** for the offence of murder I sentence you to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 26 years less time on remand which is a minimum term of 25 years and 121 days.
123. Take them down.
124. Kevin Dorward and Keith Doward, you also went over to South Moor in the car. Sean Reay used his influence through a drug debt and the offer of free drugs to you Kevin Dorward to get a lift to South Moor. He got you Keith Doward for free as a driver. Your life had spiralled down to being at the beck and call of others.
125. The Jury were not satisfied that you knew of the true purpose of the trip or that Sean Reay had a gun. However you Kevin Dorward can consider yourself fortunate that your actions in getting out of the car and going with the other four onto Elm Street did not result in a conviction for a far more serious offence. You should reflect on that for every day of the sentence you are to serve.
126. **Kevin Doward** for the offence of perverting the course Justice, I sentence you to twenty months imprisonment the time spent on remand shall count against your sentence.
127. **Keith Doward** for the offence of perverting the course Justice, I sentence you to 16 months the time spent on remand shall count against your sentence.
128. **Michaela Hetherington** for the offence of perverting the course Justice, I sentence you to 15 months the time spent on remand shall count against your sentence.
129. Take them down.